

Michigan *TimeTraveler*

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center

GROWING UP IN THE 1880s

What was it like to grow up in a world with few telephones and no radios or televisions? This month's Time Traveler takes you back 120 years to find out.

Kids' History

At the end of the nineteenth century, most families lived on farms or in rural towns. Most farms had no electricity or indoor plumbing. There were few telephones and no televisions. Water was pumped from wells. Wood or coal was the fuel for heating and cooking.

Families grew their own food and kept animals like cows, pigs and chickens. Cows provided milk and butter. Chickens provided fresh eggs. Farm families could sell their extra eggs, butter and milk in town and buy flour, sugar and coffee. Since the nearest town might be miles away, families generally only traveled there once a week, on foot or by horse-drawn wagon.

CHORES

Children helped their parents with the daily chores. They milked cows, gathered eggs, picked fruit and weeded the garden. Girls helped their mothers with sewing, washing clothes, cooking, churning butter, canning fruits and vegetables and cleaning the house. Boys helped plant and harvest crops and chop wood.



▲ This is the corn planter. It is a tool that helps make planting faster and easier.

▶ Molly practices her penmanship with her slate and slate pencil in the one-room schoolhouse. The letters should be formed just right!

▶ Molly learns how to milk a cow as she plays with the climbing bear toy.

PLAY

Much leisure time was spent outdoors. Favorite pastimes included horseback riding, skating, bicycling, reading and games such as croquet and marbles. Children looked forward to events like picnics, holiday celebrations, and the local fair.



▶ The Jacob's Ladder is great fun! I wonder how it works?



Tami Averill, Curator of Education at the Michigan Historical Museum, tells stories of children in the 1880s during a "Growing Up In Michigan" program.

SCHOOL

Before 1883, one out of four children did not attend school regularly. Some children stayed at home to help on the farm. Others went to work in the mines, mills, and factories. After 1883, children from eight to fourteen years of age were required to attend school at least four months a year. Rural areas often had one-room schoolhouses where several grades were taught. Most children walked to school. Lessons included reading, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, penmanship, and geography.



Adeline Eliza Graham

Adeline Eliza Graham was born in 1865 and lived on a farm in Berrien Springs, Michigan. In her diary she admits to being a "tomboy" and talks about her friends, chores and games she played. She married Thomas "Lee" Wilkinson whom she talks about in her diary.

Adeline Eliza Graham ca. 1882
Used with permission of Berrien County Historical Association.



Summer pastimes

May 13, 1880

"Yesterday Daisy and I went horse back riding. She is very cowardly about horses so we didn't race fast, but after we came back I had a jolly ride up to the farm and down to the woods."

June 1, 1880

"Then Daisy and I played about two hours, reading new duets and such things. Then we all turned out and picked strawberries."

May 6, 1882

"Had a splendid game of ball at school yesterday noon."

Chores

June 1, 1880

"Pa and the hired man went to Niles today and as I am generally 'The Man of the Family' when they are both gone he left the horses and things in my care, and I always like that more than most anything. So I watered the horses first thing.

July 7, 1880

"Got up at eight in the morning, got through breakfast by nine, washed the two or three dishes, made the bed, read awhile, fed and watered the ducks, read Grandma to sleep or rather tried to. Then, while she was 'catching a nap,' I went out in the apple tree and read."

Lee

August 16, 1882

"After tea I went out with Lee and had a real good time."

"I confess to have a weakness for Lee in spite of the many times I have been mad at him and vowed I would never speak to him again."

Delevan Brotherton

Delevan Brotherton was born in Marquette, Michigan in 1867 but grew up in Escanaba, Michigan. He kept a diary describing his friends, school, jobs, and girls he liked. He worked with his father as a surveyor and later married and became a successful businessman in Escanaba.

The 4th of July

July 4, 1883

"At 8 o'clock I went over for Minnie. We walked down to the fireworks stand; but, it not being time to commence yet, we walked around a while. Then seated ourselves on a log near the shore. We had a pleasant time there till fireworks were over."

Summer pastimes

May 3, 1883

"We skated on roller skates some."

June 7, 1883

"Pleasant. Stayed around home all day. After supper I went down to Dick's. Mabel, Dick's sister, was out playing croquet part of the time."

Chores

May 29, 1883

"Working in garden after school and after supper."

August 24, 1883

"Got job from J.F. Oliver to take the school census, and from the four Supervisors of this city to take the births and deaths of 1882."

Sunday School

August 12, 1883

"Went to Sunday School. Was elected treasurer. Have two offices now, Librarian and Treasurer. Went out walking p.m. About 8:30, shot twice at a skunk that was entering our yard and getting too familiar. Too dark could not see the sights. Missed. Skunk gone."

At the Michigan Historical Museum

Visit the "Growing Up In Michigan, 1880-1895" gallery. Walk through period rooms and a one-room schoolhouse as you follow the stories of Della Thompson, Adeline, Delevan, Alice Laura Stevenson and James Carrothers. Become a Future Historian! Students in 4th through 12th grades learn about collecting, exhibiting and promoting history and assist museum staff in programs and special events. The Future Historians meet from 6:30p.m. to 7:30p.m. on Sept. 28, Oct. 26, Nov. 30, 2004 Jan. 25, Feb. 22, March 29, April 26 and May 24, 2005. For more information contact David Bridgens at (517) 241-0594 or bridgensd@michigan.gov.

THINGS TO DO

Start your own diary or journal. Write about events you enjoy, family, friends, chores, and games you play. Talk to your parents or grandparents about their childhoods. Compare their experiences with your life today.



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